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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000002

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION SITREP 1: CANDIDATE REGISTRATION A LOSS
FOR THE OPPOSITION

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

1. (C) The Belarusian Central Election Committee announced December 23 that 23,791 people were registered as candidates for the January 14 local council elections. The CEC results showed signs of manipulation, such as a candidate per seat coefficients identical to past local council elections and similar results for female and youth participation. Only 2.2% of registered candidates, or 535, were members of political parties and even fewer were from the opposition. The registration process eliminated many opposition contenders from the race, as was expected. Ideology officers continue to play a large role in the outcome of the local council elections. End summary.

CEC Announces Final Results

2. (U) Central Election Committee (CEC) Secretary Nikolai Lozovik December 23 announced that 23,791 people were registered as candidates competing for the 22,661 local council seats. Out of the 23,791 registered candidates, 44.4% were women, 48.3% incumbents, and 7.3% under the age of 30. Seventeen candidates were Russian citizens with permanent residence in Belarus.

	Minsk	Vitebsk	Brest	Mogilev	Grodno	Gomel	M.City
Candidates	5,022	3,685	3,743	3,365	3,174	4,479	169
Seats	-----	3,389	3,573	3,223	3,093	4,338	55
Ratio	-----	1.08	1.05	1.04	1.03	1.03	3.07
Women	46.4%	44.8	39.6	43.0	43.5	----	18.0
Youth	5.5	6.1	6.3	7.0	5.7	----	22.0
Incumbent	44.2	----	----	42.0	52.0	----	12.0

3. (C) The above table of election results already shows telltale signs of registration manipulation. The candidate to seat coefficient in all the oblasts is between 1.03 and 1.08; the same as the coefficient range from the 1999 and 2003 local council elections. Head of the Minsk office of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) Tatyana Protko explained to Poloffs December 21 that this unchanging coefficient was a sign of election commission fraud. According to the BHC's recent election observation report, 99% of rural/village seats were uncontested, but not one voting district was without a candidate. This, according to Protko, demonstrated that the authorities were choosing people to run in every district (see para 7). Another indicator of fraud is that each oblast registered almost identical percentages of women and youth candidates (approximately 44% and 5-7%, respectively).

Scores Tallied, Opposition Losing

¶4. (U) Political party representatives made up 2.2% of those registered, or 535. Lozovik commented that the majority of affiliated candidates represented "constructive" opposition parties, namely the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) with 239 candidates and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) with 62 candidates. Pro-government political parties that seem to exist only during elections, such as the Republican Party of Labor and the Agrarian Party also registered a few candidates.

¶5. (U) Pro-democracy parties were less successful in getting nominees registered as candidates. According to the CEC, the Belarusian National Front (BNF) registered 69 candidates out of 132 nominees (a 52% success rate), the United Civic Party (UCP) registered 68 out of 150 (45%), and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) registered 44 candidates out of 90 (49%).

The Denial Process

¶6. (C) Election commissions continued to apply double standards to opposition nominees. Applications from government candidates were accepted without review, whereas the minutest alleged error in applications from opposition candidates resulted in registration denial. CEC Head Lidiya Yermoshina on December 21 admitted that territorial election commissions had been "excessively scrupulous" in registering candidates. According to the BHC, election commissions would not provide instructions to independent/opposition candidates on how to fill out the necessary tax declaration forms

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(created especially for candidate registration) and referred them to tax authorities, who in turn refused to provide assistance. Election commissions also denied registration to candidates for allegedly submitting signature lists containing fake signatures. Government-backed candidates did not report problems with their paperwork or signature lists (see para 7).

The Domineering Ideology Officer

¶7. (C) The BHC noted the influence local ideology officers had on the election process. Ideology officers personally direct their district's election process and ultimately decide the outcome. Ideology officers pre-select members of local and territorial election commissions, serve as either the chair or vice chair on precinct election commissions, choose government-backed candidates for each district, and fill out candidates' registration materials. The BHC noted that government-backed candidates are not actively campaigning or using their radio time because they know with administrative support they will win.

Comment

¶8. (C) Past elections in Belarus have shown that the processes leading up to Election Day are rife with GOB manipulation. Since the registration process began, we have seen the GOB deploy all of its common tactics. The registration period, just as in the Parliamentary elections of 2004, proved to be the GOB's first cut at weeding out the opposition. We expect authorities to interfere in opposition campaigns further by prohibiting meetings with voters, arresting candidates, and seizing campaign materials.

Moore